

Fragment answers with infinitives in a Flemish dialect

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This paper is devoted to a construction in a specific Flemish dialect, in which infinitives are used in fragment answers in contexts where this would be unacceptable in other varieties. Questions such as *Waar is mijn boek?* ‘Where is my book?’ can be answered with constructions such as *Op tafel liggen* ‘lay.INF on the table’. We apply an analysis in terms of ellipsis to these infinitival constructions. However, we find fragment answers with infinitives in contexts where the assumption of ellipsis is problematic, since there is no plausible underlying structure available. We show that the use of this construction has extended to contexts in which the infinitive independently expresses the clausal tense features. Our description of the construction is based on a questionnaire study in which around thirty speakers were tested.

Keywords: Fragment answers, ellipsis, infinitival tense, microvariation

1. Introduction

In Standard Dutch non-finite verb forms may sometimes be used independently in main clauses. In most cases we are dealing with directive language use:

- (1) a. Af-blijven! (orders)
keep-off.INF
‘Keep off!’
- b. Koffie drinken! (requests)
coffee drink.INF
‘Shall we drink a coffee?’

Such sentences do not contain an explicit tense marker. A descriptive generalisation about such cases is that the directive reading could be a kind of default interpretation that is assigned in the absence of explicit marking and that they are interpreted in the here and now by virtue of the speech act they express.

Similar constructions are not available in Standard Dutch for normal affirmative sentences. This paper describes the properties of a construction occurring in particular Flemish dialects in which infinitives are used in another context than in (1) and likewise express tense features. Several informants, especially from Maldegem, report that constructions like the following are possible in their dialect:

- (2) a. A: Waar is mijn bril?
 where is my glasses
 ‘Where are my glasses?’
 B: Op tafel liggen.
 on table lie.INF
 ‘Lying on the table.’
 b. A: Hoe oud ben jij?
 ‘How old are you?’
 B: Vierenzestig worden in mei.
 sixty-four become.INF in May
 ‘I’ll be sixty-four in May.’

We have attested this use of the infinitive in the spontaneous language of Maldegem speakers.

The infinitival constructions in (2) are unacceptable in Standard Dutch, but cases like (3), in which the relation between question and answer is more direct do occur in Standard Dutch:

- (3) A: Wat vinden de kinderen leuk?
 what find.3PL the children nice
 ‘What do the children like?’
 B: In de hof spelen.
 in the garden play.INF
 ‘Playing in the garden.’

A crucial difference between the construction as it is found in Maldegem and the Standard Dutch possibilities, is that Standard Dutch cases can be described as examples in which there is already clarity about a state of affairs, but the content of a specific constituent is asked for. An obvious description for such sentences is that the VP *in de hof spelen* is a remnant of clausal ellipsis of the type found in fragment answers (Merchant 2004). This is less clear for the examples in (2), which are indeed ill-formed in Standard Dutch. In these cases, there is no structure available in the dialect which can be assumed as an underlying structure in which ellipsis has applied. With regard to (2a), for example, a construction like *Mijn bril is/doet op tafel liggen* (‘My glasses is/does lie.INF on the table’) would be highly implausible,

since such uses of these auxiliaries (with inanimate subject and static predicate) are completely ill-formed in Standard Dutch as well as in the Maldegem dialect.

So, the construction is not only intrinsically relevant from the perspective of dialect descriptions, but also because cases as in (2) are instances of a construction in which the infinitive expresses tense features. This is relevant from the perspective of analyses like in Zwart's (2014) recent paper on the relation between tense and infinitives. Furthermore, according to Merchant (2004: 674–675) fragment answers can be analysed as constructions in which the fragment is moved to a clause-peripheral position, triggering ellipsis of its complement, and in which the omitted part has to be semantically identical to the antecedent in the question. It is clear that the construction under investigation here cannot always be characterized in such terms; in cases like (2a), it is difficult to find a plausible underlying structure and (as a consequence) to identify an omitted part that is semantically identical to the antecedent.

2. Questionnaire

The construction discussed in this paper was not observed in the literature before. So, we had to be careful in drawing conclusions about the existence of the construction as part of a certain dialect and not as an incidentally occurring slip of the tongue. That is why we carried out a tentative study, in which 50 informants were asked to assess constructions like (2): 32 speakers from Maldegem and 18 speakers of other varieties. 26 out of the 32 Maldegem speakers report that they recognise the construction and find it acceptable. The other speakers report that they would rather use constructions like the following:

- (4) A: Waar is mijn bril?
 B: Ie ligt op tafel.
 he lies on table
 'It is lying on the table.'

In a second phase, 31 informants participated in a study in which they were asked to judge 32 fragment answers. Table 1 gives an overview.

Table 1. Informants

Dialect/variety	Age	Gender	Informant number	Age	Gender	Informant number
Maldegem (East-Flanders)	33	v	I	44	v	VIII
	37	v	II	39	v	IX
	42	m	III	45	m	X
	62	v	IV	37	m	XI
	63	m	V	37	v	XII
	70	v	VI	61	v	XIII
	71	m	VII			
West-Flemish dialects	46	v	XIV	42	v	XVI
	34	m	XV	43	m	XVII
East-Flemish dialect	43	v	XVIII			
Antwerp dialect	39	v	XIX			
Supra-regional Flemish variety	34	m	XX	35	v	XXIII
	16	v	XXI	39	v	XXIV
	39	v	XXII	42	v	XXV
Zeeland Flanders dialect	67	m	XXVI			
	49	v	XXVII			
Standard Dutch (BE)	51	m	XXVIII			
idem (NL)	34	v	XXIX			
	30	m	XXX			
	38	m	XXXI			

Three possible answers to questions such as *Waar is Tom?* are tested (see table 2). The first variant contains a finite verb as in *Hij speelt buiten*. The second variant is a construction with *aan het* and the third variant contains an infinitive without *aan het*.

The questionnaire displays variation in the grammatical properties of the sentences, which will be further explained in section 3.

Table 2. Test sentences

Question		Answer
Waar is Tom?	1	Hij speelt buiten
where is Tom		he plays outdoors
	2	Buiten aan het spelen
		outdoors PREP DET play.INF
	3	Buiten spelen.
		outdoors play.INF
Waar is mijn bril?	4/5	compare 1/2
... my glasses?	6	Op de trap liggen.
		on the stairs lie.INF
Waar is papa?	7/8	compare 1/2
... dad?	9	In de zetel zitten.
		in the chair sit.INF
Waar is jouw velo?	10/11	compare 1/2
... your bike	12	Tegen de muur staan.
		against the wall stand.INF
Wat doet Emma?	13/14	compare 1/2
what does Emma	15	Op straat lopen.
		on street walk.INF
Waar is nonkel Jef?	16/17	compare 1/2
where is uncle Jef	18	De auto wassen.
		the car clean.INF
Waar was Tom vanmiddag?	19/20	compare 1/2
where was Tom this.afternoon	21	In de tuin werken.
		in the garden work.INF
Waar was mama gisteravond?	22/23	compare 1/2
... mum yesterday.evening	24	Televisie kijken.
		television watch.INF
Waar was dat boek nu eigenlijk?	25/26	compare 1/2
where was that book PRT actually	27	Op mijn kamer liggen.
		on my room lie.INF
Waar was je velo nu vanmorgen?	28/29	compare 1/2
... your bike PRT this.morning	30	Tegen de muur staan.
		against the wall stand.INF
Waar zijn Emma en Tom?	31	Ze doen buiten spelen.
where are Emma and Tom		they do.3PL outdoors play.INF
Wat doen Emma en Tom?	32	Ze doen buiten spelen.
what do.3PL

Sentences [31]/[32]¹ were added to examine whether there is a connection between the occurrence of infinitival constructions and constructions with *doen*.

In a written questionnaire, we asked the informants to judge the sentences on a scale with the following possible judgements:

- “completely impossible” (1)
- “not completely impossible, but doesn’t sound so well” (2)
- “doubtful” (3)
- “sounds relatively well, but is not possible with 100% certainty” (4)
- “certainly possible” (5)

The instruction was to judge whether the sentences were possible in the informant’s language variety. The test sentences were presented in Dutch with minor adjustments to the local dialect (e.g. use of *velo* instead of *fiets* ‘bicycle’).

3. Results

Table 3 contains average scores per sentence, for the speakers of the Maldegem dialect and other varieties.

The test sentences in bold are the fragment answers with an infinitival construction. In most cases (except [18]) these sentences get, on average, higher scores from the Maldegem informants. A Mann-Whitney U-test shows that this is significant for [6], [9], [12], [27] ($U = 43$, $Z = -2.9424$, $p = 0.00328$; $U = 58$, $Z = -2.3419$, $p = 0.01928$; $U = 44$, $Z = -2.9023$, $p = 0.00374$; $U = 42$, $Z = -2.9824$, $p = 0.00288$). Note that the average scores given by Maldegem speakers for the sentences with fragment answers are still relatively low, i.e. lower than for the variant with a finite verb, like in [1]/[4] and similar examples. The reason for this is that there is interspeaker variation among Maldegem speakers, as will be represented by the tables below in which individual scores are presented. That was to be expected, given that table 1 shows that there is much variation among speakers with regard to variables like age and we could expect that younger speakers provide judgements which are influenced by Standard Dutch, among other factors.

Sentences [3]/[18] contain dynamic predicates, whereas [6]/[9]/[12] contain static predicates. The scores of these sentences as attributed by all informants are represented in table 4.

1. We use square brackets to refer to sentences from the questionnaire.

Table 3. Average scores

nr. sentence	average Maldegem infor- mants (I-XIII)	average other informants (XIV-XXXI)	average total (I-XXXI)	nr.	average Maldegem	average other	av. total	nr.	average Maldegem	average other	av. total
1	4.3	4.5	4.4	16	4.5	4.5	4.5	31	1.2	1.1	1.1
2	4.9	4.7	4.8	17	4.9	4.8	4.9	32	1.8	1.1	1.4
3	2.7	2.0	2.3	18	2.0	2.1	2.1				
4	5.0	4.9	4.9	19	3.8	3.9	3.9				
5	1.6	1.2	1.4	20	4.7	4.3	4.5				
6	3.5	1.4	2.3	21	2.0	1.8	1.9				
7	5.0	4.9	5.0	22	4.4	3.7	4.0				
8	2.3	2.4	2.4	23	4.6	4.4	4.5				
9	3.2	1.6	2.2	24	1.5	1.9	1.7				
10	5.0	4.9	4.9	25	5.0	4.8	4.9				
11	1.6	1.6	1.6	26	1.6	1.3	1.5				
12	3.2	1.4	2.2	27	3.1	1.4	2.1				
13	4.8	4.8	4.8	28	5.0	5.0	5.0				
14	3.3	2.7	3.0	29	1.5	1.4	1.5				
15	4.7	3.5	4.0	30	2.3	1.4	1.8				

Table 4. Dynamic vs. static predicates

Maldegem dialect													Other varieties																
3	2	2	3	2	5	1	5	1	5	2	2	4	1	4	1	1	2	1	1	4	1	1	2	5	3	2			
18	2	1	3	1	5	1	5	1	2	2	1	1	1	4	1	1	2	4	1	1	2	1	1	5	1	2	2	2	5
6	1	5	4	5	5	5	5	1	5	2	2	5	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
9	1	4	3	5	5	3	5	1	5	2	1	5	1	5	1	1	1	2	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
12	1	5	3	5	5	2	5	1	5	2	2	5	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Maldegem informants attribute higher scores to cases with static predicates, whereas the other informants ascribe higher scores to dynamic predicates. Both differences are statistically significant ($U = 359$, $Z = 1.9751$, $p = 0.0477$; $U = 666$, $Z = -2.5161$, $p = 0.01174$). This result can be related to table 3, which shows that the difference between the Maldegem and non-Maldegem group indeed was significant for [6], [9] and [12], but not for [3]. For [18] the average score for the Maldegem group is even somewhat lower than for the others. Probably, this can be related to the fact that precisely [3]/[18] contain dynamic predicates.

In order to find out whether tense influences the scores we compare [3]/[6]/[9]/[12]/[18] with present tense with [21]/[24]/[27]/[30] with past tense. Table 5 presents scores given by Maldegem speakers.

Table 5. Present vs. past tense in Maldegem speakers

Present														Past													
3	2	2	3	2	5	1	5	1	5	2	2	4	1	21	2	1	5	1	5	1	1	1	2	3	1	2	1
6	1	5	4	5	5	5	5	1	5	2	2	5	1	24	1	1	3	1	3	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1
9	1	4	3	5	5	3	5	1	5	2	1	5	1	27	2	1	5	5	5	5	2	1	5	2	2	4	1
12	1	5	3	5	5	2	5	1	5	2	2	5	1	30	1	2	3	5	5	1	1	1	5	2	1	2	1
18	2	1	3	1	5	1	5	1	2	2	1	1	1														

This table reveals that for a number of Maldegem informants scores for sentences with present tense lie higher than with past tense, which is significant ($U = 1295.5$, $Z = 2.1612$, $p = 0.03078$).

There might be a connection between the existence of sentences with *doen* as in [31], and variants with an infinitive as in [3]. The infinitival fragment answer *Buiten spelen* could be the result of ellipsis of the subject and the form of the verb *doen* in an underlying sentence structure *Tom doet buiten spelen* ‘Tom does outside play.INF’. Therefore, it is relevant to investigate whether constructions with do-support such as [31]/[32] are accepted. The judgements of the 13 Maldegem dialect speakers are not univocal. Speakers of other Flemish dialects or varieties, however, unanimously attribute the lowest score (see table 6).

Table 6. *Doen*-constructions

Maldegem dialect														Other varieties													
31	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	
32	1	1	3	3	4	1	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1

The relation between *doen*-constructions and fragment answers with infinitives is further discussed in 4.1 below.

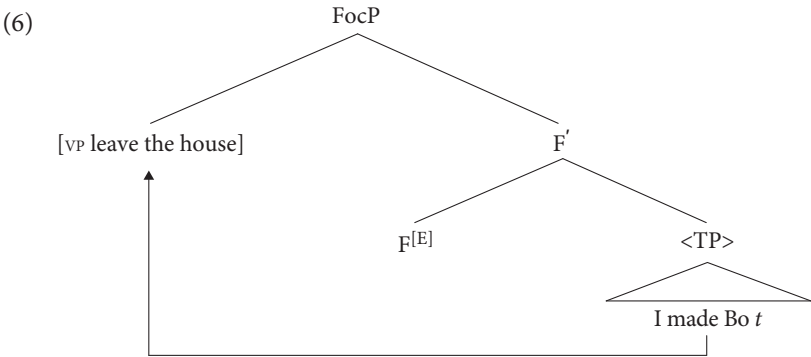
4. Analysis

4.1 Applying an ellipsis analysis

Our construction is related to the type of elliptic construction discussed by Merchant (2004), illustrated in (5).

- (5) A: What did you make Bo do?
 B: Leave the house.

Merchant (2004:674–675) assumes that the fragment is moved to a clause-peripheral specifier position of a functional projection (which could be associated with focus). The head of this projection contains the feature ‘E’, which triggers ellipsis of its complement:



An advantage of this analysis is that the type of ellipsis that we find in fragment answers in this way gets the same analysis as other elliptic constructions, like *sluicing*. More recently, in work by Ott and De Vries (for example Ott 2014, Ott & De Vries 2016), this ellipsis operation has been presented in a different form in their work on deletion phenomena in dislocation structures. Ott & De Vries (2016:646) assume that “[t]he dislocated XP is fronted within CP₂ and the [...] surface pattern is the result of subsequent deletion of redundant material in that

clause”.² Semantically, ellipsis has to fulfil the requirement of recoverability: ellipsis can only be applied if the recipient is able to recover the meaning from the context. Merchant (2004) uses the notion *e-givenness* in order to indicate this requirement. For reasons of space (and since the matter remains controversial, cf. Ott & De Vries 2016:652), we cannot go into the technical details, but we can state that there does not need to be a complete formal similarity between question and answer, though (intuitively) there has to be an equivalence in meaning between the omitted part and the antecedent. More concretely, *e-givenness* corresponds to a mutual entailment relation between deleted constituent and antecedent, in which open variables are existentially bound in both the deleted constituent and its antecedent.

On the basis of this analysis we expect that ellipsis is acceptable in sentences like [2]. The representation of (7) is based on work by De Vries and Ott, but adapted to our construction. The elements *Tom* and *is* are recoverable from the question, in this case on the basis of formal similarity:

- (7) A. Waar is Tom?
 B. [_{CP} [buiten aan het spelen]_i [~~is-Tom-t_i~~]]

The claim that ellipsis is acceptable in (7) is confirmed in table 3, from which we can see that on average the informants, regardless of their origin from Maldegem or elsewhere, accept example (7).

There are some cases in which the informants do not accept fragment answers with *aan het*. The construction is rejected in [5]/[11]/[26]/[29]. In these cases, however, the result without ellipsis is heavily marked as well, as illustrated in (8), which corresponds to [5]:

- (8) *Mijn bril is op de trap aan het liggen.
 my glasses is on the stairs PREP DET lie.INF
 ‘My glasses are lying on the stairs.’

This can be accounted for by the fact that the construction semantically corresponds to the expression of “progressive actions” (Booij 2004). A similar interpretation is not applicable to (8). So, the low scores for sentences like [5] can be explained by the fact that the underlying structures are semantically unacceptable as well.

Also a sentence like [15] can be represented in the tradition of Merchant’s (2004) insights, as represented in (9):

2. The subscript is relevant in their theory, which assumes biclausal structures in which two clauses, CP₁ and CP₂, are juxtaposed. In this way they are able to represent left and right dislocation structures.

(9) A: Wat doet Emma?

B: [_{CP} Op straat lopen]_i [~~doet Emma~~_{t_i}]

The omitted part contains a construction with *doen*, which is recoverable from the question. Thus, the fragment answer is an elliptic variant of a *doen*-construction:

(10) Emma doet op straat lopen.

Emma does on street walk.INF

'Emma walks on the street.'

On the basis of this assumption we could expect that there is a connection between *doen*-constructions and fragmentary constructions with infinitive. We observed that part of the Maldegem informants accepts (to a certain extent) the use of *doen* in this kind of contexts, like [32]. If this type of *doen*-construction exists in the Maldegem dialect, which is the case at least according to a percentage of speakers, it may probably serve as underlying form for ellipsis in (10). Sentence [15] indeed scores 4.7 within the Maldegem group.

One could object to this analysis by referring to the fact that in most cases, *doen*-constructions are not accepted by the Maldegem speakers. However, it is a well-known fact that in some contexts the use of periphrastic *doen* is acceptable beyond doubt. Short answers with *doen* occur in the context of negative or positive statements (Barbiers 2013:202), which is illustrated by a negative example:

(11) A: Hij slaapt.

'He is sleeping.'

B: Hij en doet

He NEG does

'No, he is not.'

Although *doen* as a periphrastic auxiliary in the Maldegem dialect is clearly a restricted phenomenon (the analysis of which is not within the scope of this article), the hypothesis that the deleted part contains the auxiliary *doen* is more plausible than alternative assumptions.

An alternative hypothesis would be that fragment answers such as in (9) are based on underlying absentive constructions, which do occur in Standard Dutch (cf. for example Broekhuis 2013):

(12) A: Waar is Jan?

where is Jan?

'Where is Jan?'

B: Jan is vissen.

Jan is fish.INF

'Jan is off fishing.'

There are, however, a number of differences between the absentive construction and the Maldegem construction. The absentive construction is used to indicate that “the person referred to by the subject is not present at (...) the deictic centre” (De Groot 2000:694). This implies that the use of the adverb ‘here’ is impossible in an absentive construction. However, in (2a) the answer in B could be unproblematically replaced by *hier liggen* ‘here lie.INF’. This suggests that absence of the deictic centre is not a requirement of this construction. Another difference is related to the fact that in the absentive construction the subject of the clause is agentive (cf. for example Broekhuis 2013:90). With regard to Maldegem fragment answers, there is no preference for such cases with an agentive subject, as can be derived from the scores for sentences [6]/[12]/[27] (cf. tables 3 and 5).

Note, finally, that the (typically Northern-Dutch) construction in (12) does not exist in the Maldegem dialect and is judged completely unacceptable by Maldegem speakers (like the first author of this article). On the assumption that an ellipsis analysis is preferable (which builds on work by Merchant 2004 and his analysis of examples as in (5)), the representation in (9) is a reasonable one.

4.2 Recoverability and identity relation

As opposed to [15], items [3]/[18] have a question without *doen*. In these cases the judgements of Maldegem and remaining speakers do not deviate very much. In §3 we related this to the presence of a dynamic predicate. How can we, apart from this, analyse sentences [3]/[18]? Our proposal is to follow the pattern of (9). For [18] this looks like representation (13):

- (13) A: Waar is nonkel Jef?
 B: [_{CP} de auto wassen]_i [~~doet nonkel Jef~~_{t_i}]

This example seems to be at odds with the assumption that ellipsis has to fulfil the requirement of recoverability. There is no univocal semantic identity between omitted part and antecedent. The verb *zijn* in the question means ‘be located’ (and the relevant location is inquired into by the wh-word), whereas *doen* describes an activity and not so much Jef’s location.

For speakers to whom fragment answers of the type in (13) are acceptable, the restriction on the relation between question and answer has to be formulated in more general terms than in Merchant’s analysis. According to Merchant (2004), the required identity is semantic, but apparently, in some dialects pragmatic identity is sufficient. In a sentence like (13), the fragment answer does not contain any explicit data about Jef’s location, but on a pragmatic basis speaker B is able to derive where he is cleaning the car, for example on the street. There is variation among speakers: some speakers only accept [15] and reject [3]/[18], while others

accept both types. Because of this the average score for [15], which does satisfy the requirement of semantic identity, lies higher than those for [3]/[18].

4.3 Fragment answers with non-animate subjects

With some adaptation example (13) can be integrated into Merchant's analysis, but sentences like [6]/[12] are still problematic. For these sentences it is impossible to reconstruct an underlying form according to the grammatical rules. The problem is that *doen*-constructions are not acceptable in the case of non-animate subjects.³ Examples of *doen*-constructions found in the literature always have a subject with a human referent (Cornips 1994) and therefore derivations (14)/(15) are implausible:

- (14) A: Waar is mijn bril?
 B: [[Op de trap liggen]_i [~~doet de bril~~_{t_i}]]
- (15) A: Waar is jouw velo?
 B: [[Tegen de muur staan]_i [~~doet de velo~~_{t_i}]]

Examples such as (14)/(15) cast another light on the description by Merchant (2004:662), who formulates two possible scenarios to account for such problematic facts. The first possibility is that we assume a new kind of ellipsis operation, "one with properties that appear to be quite distinct from the kinds of ellipses that are, at this point, fairly well understood". A second option is (somewhat simplified) that we allow non-sentential syntactic objects to be able to denote propositions. In the cases that were discussed above the first strategy could be applied, which starts from an ellipsis operation. However, fragments such as (14)/(15) cannot be described as comparable cases of ellipsis. This suggests that in particular dialects and idiolects the two possibilities that are mentioned by Merchant do not fully exclude each other: in cases like (14)/(15), in which an ellipsis analysis cannot be applied, a VP appears to have a proposition as denotation.

Admitting VPs to have a propositional semantics does not mean that we give up the whole ellipsis enterprise. We do not assume that there is something like a homogeneous and stable Maldegem dialect. On the contrary, there is inter-speaker variation and diachronic evolution in the relevant group of speakers. An alluring hypothesis is that the Maldegem type of fragment answers as in (14)/(15) is the

3. Note that in this respect *doen*-constructions are similar to absentive constructions. However, there are additional problems to the assumption that Maldegem fragment answers are based on absentive constructions, such as the fact that the Maldegem constructions can be used in contexts in which the person referred to by the subject is present at the deictic centre. See 4.1 for further discussion.

result of reanalysis of ellipsis structures into VPs receiving propositional interpretations. This does, however, not mean that all (or most) speakers have undergone this evolution which corresponds to the fact that some speakers do not accept the construction (cf. section 2).

4.4 Infinitives with tense features

So, in contexts like (14)/(15), infinitives seem to express tense features, which enable the language user to evaluate the propositions and relate them to a specific point in time:

- (16) [_{VP} Op de trap liggen]
'It is on the stairs.'

- (17) [_{VP} Tegen de muur staan]
'It stands against the wall.'

These data can be connected with observations by Zwart (2014), who argues that infinitives can express tense (and are not 'tenseless', Stowell 1982). Zwart discusses infinitives used in reduced clauses in present perfect tense and shows that in a number of contexts such infinitives clearly express semantic properties that are similar to simple present tense. Below, we will show that the infinitive in Maldegem fragment answers has a semantic distribution that is in some respects similar to the simple present as well. Zwart (2014:385) presents a view that is compatible with what he refers to as the American Structuralist position, in which tense is a clausal property generated separately from the verb, for example as an operator (cf. Chomsky 1957:39).⁴

Such a claim can be integrated in an analysis of fragment answers like (16)/(17), in which a VP turns out to have a "propositional character" (Merchant 2004), involving the assignment of tense features to an infinitive (Zwart 2014).

The assumption that in (16)/(17) the infinitives semantically match the present tense can be connected with the data in table 4, which shows that the choice of a static or dynamic predicate influences the acceptability of fragment answers. This contrast between static and dynamic also plays a role in sentences with

4. Note that constituents like (16)/(17) not only lack a finite verb, but an overt subject as well. These expressions are used in a context of a question in which the subjects can be identified as topical elements. Such elements are, for independent reasons, subject to omission. A possible analysis could be that the untensed VPs in (16)/(17), which are not projected to the higher levels of derivation, can be identified as so-called Root Phases (Haegeman 2013:100) and that the subject in the specifier position of this VP escapes the spell-out domain, like in Haegeman's (2013) description of diary subject omission.

imperfect tenses. In Dutch, a progressive reading is not fully excluded for a sentence like (18a) (Boogaart 1999), but its more neutral reading is a habitual reading, while for (18b) an interpretation in which the pictured situation is ongoing is the standard reading.

- (18) a. Jan speelt viool.
 'Jan plays the violin.'
 b. Jan zit in een zetel.
 'Jan is sitting on a chair.'

In the progressive reading of (18a) the *aan het*-construction is more common:

- (19) Jan is viool aan het spelen.
 'Jan is playing the violin.'

If we assume that the infinitive in fragment answers acts semantically as a simple present, then we expect that this infinitive has similar semantic characteristics as the forms in (18). This prediction proves to be true, given that Maldegem informants judge the use of a static predicate more acceptable than a dynamic predicate.

From table 5 it appears that a number of Maldegem informants judge sentences with present tense more acceptable than with past tense. This is in accordance with the analysis presented above, in which the infinitive matches simple present tense. This makes the infinitival construction problematic as an answer to a question containing a past tense. Note that in an ellipsis analysis such cases would not yield problems; we could assume that the omitted part contains a past tense:

- (20) A: Waar was je fiets nu vanmorgen?
 B: [[Tegen de muur staan]_i [~~deed~~ ~~hij~~ _{t_i}]]

This is not the desired result, since the corresponding sentence [30] yields very low scores.

Note finally that the Dutch simple present can be used in other temporal environments and is not always associated with the speech moment: it can refer to a future event when used with an adverbial element. So, if the infinitive in fragment answers matches the simple present, we could expect it to have this reading as well. An attested example of this was already given in (2b). We observed this use only after the questionnaire data were gathered. Such extensions of the construction can be included in future investigations into fragment answers.

5. Conclusion

We have examined fragment answers with infinitives that have grammatical properties that deviate from existing theories. It appears that the semantic identity relation adopted by Merchant (2004) is too rigorous. For a part of the informants pragmatic identity is sufficient to enable a fragment answer with an infinitive. However, this extension of the possibilities of ellipsis is not sufficient to give a complete description of the grammatical flexibility exhibited by the Maldegem fragment answers. In cases where the subject is a non-animate referent, there is no underlying structure to which ellipsis can be applied. This implies that verbal constituents with an infinitive can express a proposition and that in such constituents the infinitive carries tense features, which particularly fits Zwart's (2014) claims. The assumption that the infinitive in fragment answers can express tense autonomously, forms a point of departure for the explanation of a number of factors that influence the use of this kind of constructions, particularly grammatical tense and the distinction static/dynamic. The description presented here should instigate further research into aspects of the diachronic development and synchronic variation in this construction.

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